

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2005

HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HOLDS HURRICANE KATRINA HEARING TO EXAMINE WHO IS IN CHARGE OF NEW ORLEANS LEVEES

WASHINGTON, DC– The Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, led by Chairman Susan Collins and Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman, today held a hearing titled, “Hurricane Katrina: Who’s In Charge of the New Orleans Levees?” Today’s hearing was the ninth as part of the committee’s investigation into the government’s preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina and the second with a focus on the New Orleans Levee system.

Witnesses included, Colonel Richard P. Wagenaar, District Engineer, New Orleans District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Alfred C. Naomi, Senior Project Manager, New Orleans District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Gerard A. Colletti, Operations Manager for Completed Works, New Orleans District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Edmond J. Preau, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Public Works and Inter-modal Transportation, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development; James P. Huey, Former President of the Board of Commissioners, Orleans Levee District; Max L. Hearn, Executive Director, Orleans Levee District.

“The people of New Orleans and surrounding parishes depended on the levees to protect them. It now appears their faith had little foundation. Even though the hurricane caused extensive damage, it was the flooding from the levee breaches that actually destroyed the City of New Orleans,” said Senator Collins.

She added, “The troubling reality though is that there has been confusion on the basic question of who is in charge of the levees. The future of the City of New Orleans is inextricably linked to its levee system. Not only must we strengthen the levees themselves, but we must also strengthen the oversight of the entire levee system if we are truly to protect New Orleans from another catastrophic failure.”

Senator Lieberman said in a statement, “More than a million men, women, and children depended on these levees for their protection. Billions of dollars worth of property and economic activity lay behind these barriers. And yet, the patchwork of government agencies supposedly in charge of their maintenance and repair simply failed to ensure that the level of protection the levees were intended to provide was, in fact, being provided.”

As demonstrated by the Committee hearing this morning, there is a lack of clear roles and responsibilities for operations, maintenance, inspections, and repair of the New Orleans levees. Today’s witnesses gave conflicting assessments of who is in charge of the levees and under what circumstances they are in charge.